



NATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Action Research

facilitator's handbook

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Informed Consent

Prior to going too deeply into your action research work, it is critical to determine what type of information you need to share with parents, staff, and students, and to obtain consent from them if needed.

GUIDELINES:

- > Inform parents of what you will be doing with action research, i.e. the nature of your question, what you hope to learn, how you will collect data, the process of meeting with colleagues monthly, what you will do with the findings, etc. Explain how you will protect the names of students in the written product. Include a statement which explains that if they don't want their child to participate, to inform you. This is called passive consent.
- > Determine if you need to obtain active consent:
This would be appropriate if:
 - > the focus of your study is on a single child or a small group of children;
 - > you wish to access student records;
 - > the nature of your topic could be considered controversial; or
 - > if you have any concerns and wish to have the consent on record.
- > Remember to have letters translated for parents for whom English is their second language, and/or communicate directly with parents for whom literacy is a concern.
- > Consider whether you wish to obtain passive or active consent with staff you include in your action research work. A letter early in the year informing staff of your intentions or a brief overview at a staff meeting is recommended.

Items to Include in a Consent Letter

- > Brief topic statement for the research project
- > When will the project run? Over what period of time?
- > How will the child be involved? Is there completion of some task? Involvement in some curriculum modification? Will the child be surveyed, interviewed or observed?
- > How often will the child be involved?
- > Will records from the student's file be used as part of the research?
- > What are the potential benefits and risks to the student? to the teacher?
- > Will an analysis of the student's work be included in the research?
- > Who will have access to the information and how long will it be kept?
- > Will names be changed to protect confidentiality?
- > Include a voluntary participation statement with the right to withdraw at anytime without consequence

******SAMPLE INFORMED PARENT CONSENT LETTER******

Date

Dear Parents,

I would like to include your child in a research project I am conducting in my class around a new approach to teaching and assessing math.

During the next month, I will ask the children in the class to complete a few of math problems to determine what strategies they are using. Then I plan to introduce a series of new math problem-solving strategies to them. At the end of a three-week period I will again ask them to complete similar math problems to find out what strategies they have added to their “toolkit.” To see if they have kept using those strategies over time, I plan to assess them again two months later. In addition, I will use their other in-class math work to provide even more information about which problem-solving strategies they are using.

To help me get a better understanding of how they are mastering problem-solving strategies, I thought it would be helpful to ask them how they liked math. I have created a short survey that I will ask them to complete which will only take about 5 minutes.

Your child’s practice with math ideas at home and other places away from school can reinforce these strategies, so I have created another brief survey for parents to complete. It should only take about 5 minutes. I will send that home in the next few days.

I am the only person who will have access to the information I am collecting in this project. I do plan to write a report summarizing the results and that report will be shared (along with other teachers’ projects) with teachers across the district. I will change all of the names used in the study so no one is identifiable.

Including your child’s information as part of the report I write is your decision. I don’t anticipate any unusual risks because I am using strategies that other researchers have tried in the past without any problems. And I am hopeful that by sharing the results with other teachers, the benefits of this approach to math can be useful to more students. If now, or at any time prior to the end of the project, you want to have your child’s information removed from the project just let me know. Withdrawal from the study will in no way affect your child’s status at school, including grades. I can be reached at XXX-XXXX.

(EXAMPLE FOR ACTIVE CONSENT:

If you agree to let your child participate, please sign the bottom part of this letter and return it to me with your child. If you have questions about the project you’d like to discuss with me before agreeing to allow your child to participate, please call me at XXX-XXXX.)

Sincerely,

(Researcher’s Name)

Yes, I give my permission for my child to participate in the study on (research topic).

(Student’s full name)

(Today’s Date)

(Parent or Guardian’s signature)

******SAMPLE INFORMED TEACHER CONSENT LETTER******

Date

Dear Teacher,

I am a teacher at _____ school and I am conducting an action research project around the topic of collaborative teacher planning. I am interested in learning about the experiences of teachers who plan with at least two other teachers on a regular weekly basis and how they feel it affects their classroom processes. I plan to summarize the results in a report that will be published along with other teacher's action research reports and then shared with staff around the district. Your name or school will not be identified in my report.

I am requesting your help by allowing me to interview you. The interview should last no more than 30 minutes and would be scheduled at your convenience. In addition, I have a brief questionnaire with other related aspects that I will leave with you to complete and send back to me. The survey will take no more than 10 minutes. Once I have completed the interviews and compiled the survey results I am planning to share a summary with each of the participating teachers in a focus group discussion. The focus group will be held at a convenient location and will last no more than 90 minutes. At the focus group, I will ask you to react to the summary of the earlier data collection. Based on the focus group comments I will make any appropriate revisions. I am the only person who will have access to any information collected during the project.

The decision to participate is yours, and deciding against it will not result in any consequences for you. There really are no risks to participating, as the issues are relatively common. The benefits of participating are to help broaden my knowledge (and those who read the report) about the concept of common planning time. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

(Researcher's Name)

Yes, I agree to participate in the study on (_____ research topic _____).

(Teacher's full name)

(Today's Date)

(Teacher's signature)